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SUBJECT: NGO CONSULTATION FOCUSES ON AFRO-COLOMBIAN AND  
INDIGENOUS LAND ISSUES

¶1. Summary: On September 14, we hosted a discussion of Afro-Colombian and indigenous issues with human rights groups. Participants criticized the GOC's "democratic security" policy as a pretext to transfer lands traditionally belonging to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities to large commercial interests, but acknowledged the need for these communities to strengthen internal organization and eliminate corruption. Several charged racism remains widespread in Colombian society, contributing to security force abuses against Afro-Colombians and indigenous. The groups applauded Colombian National Police Director (CNP) General Oscar Naranjo's invitation to provide input to its plans to reform CNP training and methods, and urged the Colombian Armed Forces to do the same. End Summary.

¶2. On September 14, we hosted our quarterly consultations with human rights groups. As agreed previously with the human rights groups, the discussions focused on issues affecting Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Attendees included: Alejandra Vega of Comision Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ), Mildrey Corrales Charry of Coordinacion Colombia-Europa EU, Amaury Padilla of Asociacion Para La Promocion Social Alternativa (MINGA), Juan de Dios Mosquera of Movimiento Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Comunidades Afrocolombianas (CIMARRON), Augustin Jimenez of Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Politicos (CSPP), Raul Molina Franco of Fundacion Reiniciar, Geilar Romana of Asociacion de Afrocolombianos Desplazados (AFRODES), Diana Munoz of Colectivo de Abogados, Mario Gomez of Fundacion Restrepo Barco, Dario Senerjia of Organizacion Nacional Indigena de Colombia (ONIC) and Ivan Danilo Rueda of Comision de Justicia y Paz.

¶3. Participants voiced concern over the lack of a strong legal framework to protect collectively titled land held by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, as well as weak protection of such rights at the local level. They said many local authorities conspire with commercial interests to defraud Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups of their land. ONIC and CIMARRON criticized past laws for not being sufficiently sensitive to the historic injustices suffered by these communities, but said the situation has deteriorated further under President Uribe. Several charged that the GOC's approach to rural development--embodied in the rural development law as well as new Forestry and Mining Codes--promotes the transfer of land and resources from Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities to powerful commercial interests. They also claimed the rural development law will facilitate the legalization of paramilitary seizures of Afro-Colombian and indigenous lands.

¶4. ONIC said indigenous communities--especially in Putumayo, Cauca and Cauca--are victims of security force violence,

including killings, stigmatization, and displacement. ONIC, AFRODES, and CIMARRON claimed racial discrimination remains widespread and called for legal reforms to address these concerns. AFRODES and CIMARRON said Afro-Colombian community leaders ("consejos comunitarios") have the authority to administer collective lands and negotiate with private firms over land use, but complained many consejos are inefficient or corrupt. They acknowledged the communities need better political and internal organization. CIMARRON Director Juan De Dios Mosquera said the GOC has still not collectively titled large tracts of land traditionally used by Afro-Colombians. He also noted the GOC has not met its obligation to make credit available to communities with collective titles, adding that it is impossible for such groups to access private credit.

¶5. Several participants complained against the ineffectiveness of Plan Colombia and displacement caused by aerial eradication. Colectivo de Abogados representative Diana Munoz said Plan Colombia contributes to the "militarization" of the GOC's response to social protests, noting the GOC's use of helicopters to break up an indigenous protest in Cauca. Augusto Jimenez of CSPP said human rights groups recently met with Colombian National Police Chief General Oscar Naranjo to discuss their concerns. Naranjo welcomed civil society to assist his efforts to reform CNP training and methods. Jimenez said it would be useful if the Armed Forces launched a similar initiative.

¶6. All participants thanked us for hosting the exchange and for continuing regular meetings with human rights groups. Several voiced appreciation for visits by Embassy officials to local human rights groups' offices, saying such visits

raise their profile and provide them an extra degree of protection. We will hold the next consultations--which will focus on the statutorily setting human rights conditions--in early December.  
Brownfield